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IGNORED RESOURCES OF FRENCH LITURATURE.

It is with much hesitation that I venture to speak to you on a subject which many of you understand better than I do ; the only excuse I offer is, the profound regret with which I notice the indifference concerning French literature.

Circumstances have led me to consider deeply the resources of French literature as a substitute for Greek. I was at Smith College while the establishment of the Literary course was under consideration, and I was one of the committee for collecting information. Later, as head of the French department in the college, correspondence relating to candidates in that language passed through my hands. Since leaving Smith College, questions concerning translations of books, and preparations for higher degrees, have kept the matter before my mind.

There are three natural divisions to the subject : 1st, preparation for college ; 2d, collegiate work and preparation for higher degrees ; 3d, literary value outside of college.

First. French as equivalent for Greek. An equivalent must present parallel or compensating results in order to justify its title. As matters now stand, are the requirements in French an equivalent for the Greek ? I unhesitatingly answer " No, they offer no valid compensation." The Greek requires a grammar, which, in its logical and organic development, is an unconscious mental training ; the history of a nation whose life is a mighty drama ; practice in composition and prosody which acts as mental gymnastics putting it at its lowest level ; and the *Anabasis* and *Iliad*, that open to the youthful mind vistas of many-sided humanity, of heroic alertness, heroic patriotism, noble daring, dauntless sacrifice,—priceless lessons to the youth about to be swept into the selfish struggle for success. True, teacher or pupil may miss the lessons ; but they are there, plain enough, so that a way-faring man, though a fool, need not err therein. How is it with the equivalent ? You know, as well as I, that, although colleges differ in their requirements, I state the general condition in saying that grammar, history, composition and prosody are reduced to

a minimum. As for the *Anabasis* and the *Iliad*, what substitutes do we require? Gratefully I acknowledge the presence, here and there, of a sterling bit of literature, but the greater part of the reading is made up of novels and society plays.

What is the modern *raison d'être* of college study? Not the mere accident of entrance and sequence of graduation, but the training, the development of intelligence. It is mental calibre we need, and I do honestly believe that, as things now are, the boy or girl who enters college on a French equivalent, generally enters college with less mental development than the one who enters on classical requirements. But, you may ask, is that necessarily the case? Just as unhesitatingly as before I answer, "No, it is not necessary"; the scholar might get a mental training that would compensate the classical requirement.

The ignored resources in grammar of the French language amaze me,—not the mechanical recitation of rules; but the intelligent perception of the forms of thought. Take such subjects as the force of adverbs, the use of pronouns, the harmony and differentiation of tenses, the reasoning necessary for the discrimination of negatives, the agreement of participles, and the use of subjunctives. Let a pupil seek in the grammar the genius of the people, and contrast it with his own race. Grammar will then cease to be dry as dust; it will become live as life. The nation that makes its participles agree with the regimen preceding, is a nation that aims at clearness of relations. A nation that insists upon the subjunctive, is a nation that recognizes its own limitations and the possible rights of others. It has for years been my custom to make classes translate French subjunctive forms into equivalent English.

It was interesting to notice their growing perception that the indicative is the natural expression of a mind, dogmatic and dictatorial; the subjunctive the natural expression of a mind, conciliatory, just, cognizant of human fallibility. In English you may say, "It is the most beautiful picture I have ever seen"; in French you say, "C'est le plus beau tableau que j'aie jamais vu",—subjunctive, because you cannot have seen all pictures, or remembered all the pictures you have seen, or be sure your taste is correct; and, because, also, you have no right to impose your opinion on others. A French critic, speaking of a certain author, characterized him as "*trop à l'indicatif*." Persons may, not

unjustly, be classed under the subjunctive or the indicative type,—those who can, and those who cannot put themselves in other people's places.

Dr. Shefloe spoke of the love the inhabitants of the Channel Islands bear to the French language; he will find the same thing true wherever that language has taken root; it is so impregnated with the recognition of humanity, that no people, having once spoken it, adapt themselves cheerfully to another. Still further, that quality in French character which requires subjunctive expressions may perhaps explain the fact, that the Frenchman met the Indian in the New World with so ready a recognition of individuality that the Indian became henceforth partisan of the French. It may also afford a clue to the fact that the bitterest French animosities are aroused by those who may be called indicative types, those who do not perceive the limitations of others.

"Still harping" on the subjunctive, I am reminded that a pupil who had studied Greek, said to me, as we were considering some French subjunctive expressions, "Why, it *thinks* like the Greek." She had caught a significant feature of the language; though the structure differs from the Greek, the informing thought is similar. But to bring out this parallelism, this compensation, the teacher should himself be aware of it; should, as Dr. Babbitt suggests, know both languages. Nor must he confound grammar with philology; he must recognize grammar as organic. Grammar is to the language what the bones are to the body,—healthy bone in a living body, though; not decaying bone in a dead body.

Secondly, how is it, once in college? At present, with some exceptions, the changes are rung on novels, society plays, occasionally a play of Victor Hugo, or of some author of the time of Louis XIV., or a bit of old French. A nation possessing one of the richest, most spontaneous, original, thoughtful and artistic literatures, is represented either by its weakest elements, or by isolated fragments! Seldom does the student obtain a harmonious insight of the history, the range of thought, or the lyric power of France.

What can be done to remedy this contradiction? No rules can be laid down. You can doubtless improve much on my simple experiments. While in Smith College I used Demogeot's

literature for its style and certain mistakes ; the style would filter through the minds of the pupils ; the mistakes gave subjects of discussion. Corneille, Racine, Molière were contrasted with Victor Hugo, Lamartine and De Musset.

For a novel I once gave 'Un Cheval de Phidias', by Cherbuliez. An elective on Greek art given in French proved a great success ; the class studying Berkeley in English took up Pascal's 'Pensées' at the same time. The higher I put my standard, keeping sympathy alive, the better results followed. As time was limited, less attention was paid to pronunciation ; more to fluency and accuracy of speech and diction ; most to perception of ideas. Lyric poetry proved invaluable. It is more Greek than any other kind of poetry. A realization of this induced me to make the imperfect little collection, 'La Triade Française', for my pupils.

As to requirements for advanced degrees, let me give a recent experience. A person consulted me upon works to read for second degree, French being one of the studies to be offered. The subject suggested by the college was "Recent French Criticism of Fiction" ; the authors given were Sainte-Beuve, Guy de Maupassant, Zola, Daudet, Balzac. "Is that all?" I asked. "All." "Was nothing said of Brunetière, Montégut, Shérer, Caro?" "No." "Nothing of George Sand, Cherbuliez, Nodier, Theuriet?" "No." "Well, you must read in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*—" "Oh, but the *Revue* is too hard for me ; I cannot read that. Give me something easier." "Something *easier* for your purpose" said I—"I do not know of anything ; it seems as if the college, yourself and the degree were at cross purposes." Please notice that I leave Philology aside, speaking only of literature ; and that I hold a nation's literature should be studied in its own language.

Thirdly, what is the attitude *outside* of college ? You will probably think I belong to the indicative type when I say,—the attitude is generally one of ignorance, indifference or misconception. Translations are read rather than originals. These translations are often of second-rate, even of third and fourth-rate authors. As if English literature were to be judged in France by translations of Dime Novels or Mrs. Southworth's productions! Even when really good authors are selected, the Italian expression "translator, traitor" might be used, Grammar is placidly

ignored; subjunctives are impertinences, for English has so little subjunctive; therefore, Taine is made to lay down dogmatic decisions, where he simply expressed personal opinions; verbs agree with accusatives or nominatives; and as to participles, toss up for the agreement, seems to be the practice. Once in a while we meet a translation that surprises us by its truthfulness, as Lefcadio Hearn's rendering of 'Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard', or Andrew Lang's versions of lyrics. In the main, the fate of 'Mon Oncle et mon Curé' and 'La Morte' is the fate of novelist, poet, historian and philosopher.

The mere *meaning* of words is disregarded. A popular collection of tales renders "soupe au *lard*," by "soup of lard" not *bacon*—a mistake inexcusable for thoughtlessness, yet fairly representing the standard. The requirements for college, the work in college, influence public opinion; little is looked for, little is found. Mr. James writes on George Sand, mixes up the plots of several novels, and draws curious conclusions, that are accepted. Zola is extolled as a great artist here, while in France he is condemned. Persons, who know I read as much French as English, often ask: "Do you not find it difficult to find good French books?" My assurance that there are quite as many good ones as in English, and that the style is apt to be better, is usually received with astonishment, and a reference to "French novels." We hear much about the realistic, naturalistic schools in France; how about those in England, Germany and America? Frankly, I do not believe in those so-called schools; I believe we rise or fall according to our likes or dislikes—we *find* in the main what we *seek*. But, granted such a literature, I prefer the development which represents the natural outcome of vice, not vice condoned by sentiment. The logical French mind perceives that Tom Jones will certainly receive the penalty of his way of life, and that Sophia Weston's affection will change to contempt, unless blinded by sentimentality or coarseness. We must honestly say that French writers have not made vice *attractive*, however exactly they paint it; whereas, in English, too often, vice is either made comfortable or is condoned. No French author would have used Hardy's expression "A pure woman faithfully portrayed" for 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles.' There is a grim savageness in Guy de Maupassant that may remind you of a wild animal, but not of a wolf in sheep's clothing. Please

understand that, throughout, I compare English and French novelists of *equal mental calibre*. Pardon that long digression.

What shall I say of our marvellous lyrics,—symphonies which touch all chords of humanity? What of the revelations of art, the discoveries in history, the researches in science, wise criticisms, broad sympathy with nature and man, that makes the French literature to-day the nearest approach to Greek literature of the age of Pericles? Do you think I claim too much? Test yourselves with one artery of French literature,—the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. If you find that difficult or dry, may it not be possible that your knowledge of French is not sufficient for you to judge impartially between it and English literature? It seems egotistic to present this matter to you who know so much more than I do. Let me plead the fable of the mouse and the lion. It happens that I, the mouse, have been brought up in equal knowledge of the two literatures from childhood; while you, the lions, have been roaming over wider tracts, and, perhaps, distance may have lent illusion, instead of enchantment, to the view. Whether you deem me right or wrong, if these weak remarks call forth, anywhere, a more energetic, more penetrating, more responsive study of French literature, I shall indeed be content.

LOUISE BOTH-HENDRIKSEN.

BROOKLYN.